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Developing Your Personal Communication Skills

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Personal communication can be a challenge especially when strong emotions, beliefs, principles or convictions are involved. These things may make it difficult for you to listen to someone else. Sometimes, you may find yourself willing to listen, but the other person wouldn't be as generous. When this happens, you have to remember that the key to good personal communication lies on your willingness to let someone know that you are willing to be there for the person and to listen to him or her.

I am Here! I am Listening!

The implication of this commitment to personal communication is huge. This means that you need to be fully present completely. You need to devote your entire attention to listening and understanding what the

other person has to say. This means putting the person above anything else that you could be doing at that precise moment. It is saying, "There is nowhere else I'd rather be than here."

You can't allow your thoughts to wander and you can't let yourself be distracted by other things. You need to devote your attention to the person you are talking to. Personal communication requires that you need to be in the present in order to hear what the other person has to say.

Acknowledge the Other Person

In order to get your commitment across, you need to acknowledge the other person. This is another secret to a successful personal communication. Everyone wants to be acknowledged and if a person is talking to you, he or she expects that you will acknowledge his or her presence as well. You also need to acknowledge the other person's right to his opinions, thoughts and beliefs. You may not necessarily agree but you have to offer some form of validation. You need to show respect for the other person's thoughts and opinions.

Manifesting Personal Communication Skills

You can definitely improve your skills for [personal communication](#). You can start with friendly gestures like a smile or a positive greeting. These skills are particularly important if you are working in a company. They will also help you especially if your job involves relating to people constantly. A smile will get you far. If you have employees, you need to make emphasize on the need for your staff to acknowledge people's presence. No one appreciates being overlooked or ignored. It doesn't take a lot to acknowledge people's presence. Simple gestures often suffice. You just need to let the person know he or she is seen.

How to Listen Effectively

Regardless of the situation, you need to know how to listen effectively if you want to build a strong personal communication with another person. To some people, [listening](#) does not come naturally. If you are one of them, you may have to devote some time to learning and developing these skills.

When talking to someone, it is important that you know your intentions. Ask yourself, "Why should I listen to this person?" You need to be calm in order to connect more effectively. If you have a customer raging at you for a bad service, you will hardly be able to sort out the problem if you are not calm. The same technique can be used when dealing with personal issues with another person.

Now, the minute the other person speaks, you should direct your attention on him or her. Don't let your mind wander. Many people fail to listen effectively because they do not really hear what the other person is saying because they are focused on figuring out what they are going to say next. In order to build better personal communication skill, you need to learn to empathize and you can only do this if you start listening. You will realize that if you would really bother to listen, you would eventually find yourself really interested to hear more.

Take time, however, to react. Take at least half a minute to respond. Process your thoughts, so you will know exactly the right thing to say. Many people do not bother to this, so they often end up with their foot in their mouth.

Personal communication starts with wanting to understand. This is actually the crucial characteristic of listening. The minute you have someone in need of your attention, make sure that you direct your attention to the person wholly.

Article from:

<http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkll/ActiveListening.htm>

Active Listening

Hear What People are Really Saying

Learn how to hear the whole message by using active listening techniques.

Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major impact on your job effectiveness, and on the quality of your relationships with others.

For instance:

- We listen to obtain information.
- We listen to understand.
- We listen for enjoyment.
- We listen to learn.

Given all this listening we do, you would think we'd be good at it! In fact most of us are not, and research suggests that we remember between 25 percent and 50 percent of what we hear. That means that when you talk to your boss, colleagues, customers or spouse for 10 minutes, they pay attention to less than half of the conversation. This is dismal!

Turn it around and it reveals that when you are receiving directions or being presented with information, you aren't hearing the whole message either. You hope the important parts are captured in your 25-50 percent, but what if they're not?

Clearly, listening is a skill that we can all benefit from improving. By becoming a better listener, you will improve your productivity, as well as your ability to influence, persuade and negotiate. What's more, you'll avoid conflict and misunderstandings. All of these are necessary for workplace success!

Tip:

Good communication skills require a high level of [self-awareness](#) + . By understanding your personal style of communicating, you will go a long way towards creating good and lasting impressions with others.

About Active Listening

The way to improve your listening skills is to practice "active listening." This is where you make a conscious effort to hear not only the words that another person is saying but, more importantly, try to understand the complete message being sent.

In order to do this you must pay attention to the other person very carefully.

You cannot allow yourself to become distracted by whatever else may be going on around you, or by forming counter arguments that you'll make when the other person stops speaking. Nor can you allow yourself to get bored, and lose focus on what the other person is saying. All of these contribute to a lack of listening and understanding.

Tip:

If you're finding it particularly difficult to concentrate on what someone is saying, try repeating their words mentally as they say them – this will reinforce their message and help you stay focused.

To enhance your listening skills, you need to let the other person know that you are listening to what he or she is saying. To understand the importance of this, ask yourself if you've ever been engaged in a conversation when you wondered if the other person was listening to what you were saying. You wonder if your message is getting across, or if it's even worthwhile continuing to speak. It feels like talking to a brick wall and it's something you want to avoid.

Acknowledgement can be something as simple as a nod of the head or a simple "uh huh." You aren't necessarily agreeing with the person, you are simply indicating that you are listening. Using body language and other signs to acknowledge you are listening also reminds you to pay attention and not let your mind wander.

You should also try to respond to the speaker in a way that will both encourage him or her to continue speaking, so that you can get the information if you need. While nodding and "uh huhing" says you're interested, an occasional question or comment to recap what has been said communicates that you understand the message as well.

Becoming an Active Listener

There are five key active listening techniques. They all help you ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

1. Pay Attention

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts.

- Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors. For example, side conversations.
- "Listen" to the speaker's body language 🧠 .

2. Show That You're Listening

Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

- Nod occasionally.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.

3. Provide Feedback

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is," and "Sounds like you are saying," are great ways to reflect back.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say." "Is this what you mean?"
- Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.

Tip:

If you find yourself responding emotionally to what someone said, say so, and ask for more information: "I may not be understanding you correctly, and I find myself taking what you said personally. What I thought you just said is XXX; is that what you meant?"

4. Defer Judgment

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

- Allow the speaker to finish each point before asking questions.
- Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

5. Respond Appropriately

Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.

- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Assert your opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person in a way that you think he or she would want to be treated.

Key Points

It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break, and if your listening skills are as bad as many people's are, then there's a lot of habit-breaking to do!

Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself frequently that your goal is to truly hear what the other person is saying. Set aside all other thoughts and behaviors and concentrate on the message. Ask questions, reflect, and paraphrase to ensure you understand the message. If you don't, then you'll find that what someone says to you and what you hear can be amazingly different!

Start using active listening techniques today to become a better communicator, improve your workplace productivity, and develop better relationships.

This site teaches you the skills you need for a happy and successful career; and this is just one of many tools and resources that you'll find here at Mind Tools. Subscribe to our [free newsletter](#), or [join the Mind Tools Club](#) and really supercharge your career!

Listening Skills

See Also: [Active Listening](#) and [Ineffective Listening](#).

Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process.

Listening is key to all effective communication, without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood – communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated.

If there is one communication skill you should aim to master then listening is it.

Listening is so important that many top employers provide listening skills training for their employees. This is not surprising when you consider that good listening skills can lead to: better customer satisfaction, greater productivity with fewer mistakes, increased sharing of information that in turn can lead to more creative and innovative work.

Many successful leaders and entrepreneurs credit their success to effective listening skills. Richard Branson frequently quotes listening as one of the main factors behind the success of Virgin.

Effective listening is a skill that underpins all positive human relationships, spend some time thinking about and developing your listening skills – they are the building blocks of success.

See our pages: [Employability Skills](#) and [Customer Service Skills](#) for more examples of the importance of listening in the workplace.

Good listening skills also have benefits in our personal lives, including:

A greater number of friends and social networks, improved self-esteem and confidence, higher grades at school and in academic work and even better health and general well-being.

Studies have shown that, whereas speaking raises blood pressure, attentive listening can bring it down.

Listening is Not the Same as Hearing

Hearing refers to the sounds that you hear, whereas listening requires more than that: it requires focus. Listening means paying attention not only to the story, but how it is told, the use of language and voice, and how the other person uses his or her body. In other words, it means being aware of both verbal and non-verbal messages. Your ability to listen effectively depends on the degree to which you perceive and understand these messages.

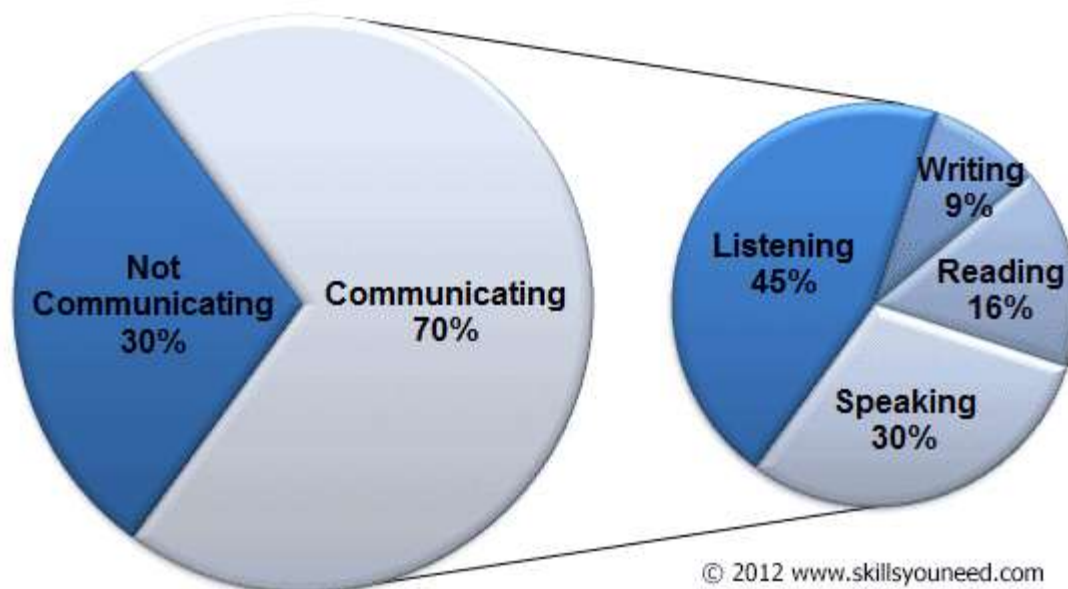
The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention.

Rachel Naomi Remen

We Spend a lot of Time Listening

Adults spend an average of 70% of their time engaged in some sort of communication, of this an average of 45% is spent listening compared to 30% speaking, 16% reading and 9% writing. (Adler, R. et al. 2001).

Time Spent Communicating



Based on the research of: Adler, R., Rosenfeld, L. and Proctor, R. (2001)

Interplay: the process of interpersonal communicating (8th edn), Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt.

Effective listening requires concentration and the use of your other senses - not just hearing the words spoken.

Listening is not the same as hearing and in order to listen effectively you need to use more than just your ears.

The 10 Principles of Listening

A good listener will listen not only to what is being said, but also to what is left unsaid or only partially said.

Effective listening involves observing body language and noticing inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal messages.

For example, if someone tells you that they are happy with their life but through gritted teeth or with tears filling their eyes, you should consider that the verbal and non-verbal messages are in conflict, they maybe don't mean what they say.

01

Stop Talking

"If we were supposed to talk more than we listen, we would have two tongues and one ear." Mark Twain.

Don't talk, listen. When somebody else is talking listen to what they are saying, do not interrupt, talk over them or finish their sentences for them. Stop, just listen. When the other person has finished talking you may need to clarify to ensure you have received their message accurately.

02

Prepare Yourself to Listen

Relax.

Focus on the speaker. Put other things out of mind. The human mind is easily distracted by other thoughts – what's for lunch, what time do I need to leave to catch my train, is it going to rain – try to put other thoughts out of mind and concentrate on the messages that are being communicated.

03

Put the Speaker at Ease

Help the speaker to feel free to speak.

Remember their needs and concerns. Nod or use other gestures or words to encourage them to continue.

Maintain eye contact but don't stare – show you are listening and understanding what is being said.

04

Remove Distractions

Focus on what is being said.

Don't doodle, shuffle papers, look out the window, pick your fingernails or similar. Avoid unnecessary interruptions. These behaviours disrupt the listening process and send messages to the speaker that you are bored or distracted.

05

Empathise

Try to understand the other person's point of view.

Look at issues from their perspective. Let go of preconceived ideas. By having an open mind we can more fully empathise with the speaker. If the speaker says something that you disagree with then wait and construct an argument to counter what is said but keep an open mind to the views and opinions of others.

See our page: [What is Empathy?](#)

06

Be Patient

A pause, even a long pause, does not necessarily mean that the speaker has finished.

Be patient and let the speaker continue in their own time, sometimes it takes time to formulate what to say and how to say it. Never interrupt or finish a sentence for someone.

07

Avoid Personal Prejudice

Try to be impartial.

Don't become irritated and don't let the person's habits or mannerisms distract you from what the speaker is really saying. Everybody has a different way of speaking - some people are for example more nervous or shy than others, some have regional accents or make excessive arm movements, some people like to pace whilst talking - others like to sit still. Focus on what is being said and try to ignore styles of delivery.

08

Listen to the Tone

Volume and tone both add to what someone is saying.

A good speaker will use both volume and tone to their advantage to keep an audience attentive; everybody will use pitch, tone and volume of voice in certain situations – let these help you to understand the emphasis of what is being said.

See our page: [Effective Speaking](#) for more.

09

Listen for Ideas – Not Just Words

You need to get the whole picture, not just isolated bits and pieces.

Maybe one of the most difficult aspects of listening is the ability to link together pieces of information to reveal the ideas of others. With proper concentration, letting go of distractions, and focus this becomes easier.

10

Wait and Watch for Non-Verbal Communication

Gestures, facial expressions, and eye-movements can all be important.

We don't just listen with our ears but also with our eyes – watch and pick up the additional information being transmitted via non-verbal communication.

See our page: [Non-verbal Communication](#).

Do not jump to conclusions about what you see and hear. You should always seek clarification to ensure that your understanding is correct.

See our pages: Clarification and Reflection for more information.

Find more at: <http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ips/listening-skills.html#ixzz3kTCVnW6A>